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SUBJECT: GOB Ready to Cooperate to Fight TIP

Ref: Minsk 0094

11. (U) In a surprisingly cooperative gesture, GOB officials willingly shared information on the GOB's efforts to combat trafficking in persons (TIP) in an informal setting on February 10. DCM invited representatives from local NGO's and international organizations as well as GOB officials from the Border Guard Committee and the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Labor and Social Security to an "Anti-TIP Coffee" at her residence to discuss TIP in Belarus and to obtain specific information for the annual 2005-2006 TIP Report. [Comment: It was surprising that so many government representatives came to DCM's residence which has been featured on Belarus Television "news" programs as a place where the opposition has met to take orders from the Embassy. End Comment.] The guests, and the GOB officials in particular, readily provided valuable information on GOB progress to combat TIP, willingly answered questions drawn from the instructions of the 2005-2006 TIP Report and even presented Pol/Econ Chief with a prepared statement summarizing GOB anti-TIP measures. [Note: This ease of information sharing differs drastically from GOB procedures in more sensitive issues such as alleged GOB human rights abuses. The GOB almost always requires a formal diplomatic note followed by a brief meeting at the appropriate Ministry or government entity for any information requests.] Though to a great extent, the NGO and government representatives did not take advantage of the opportunity to mingle, but rather talked among themselves.

12. (SBU) Yury Fedorov from the State Border Guard Troops Committee told Poloff that the presidential decrees issued over the past year have made it easier for the GOB to prosecute traffickers. [Note: The latest counter-TIP measures by the GOB are comprised mainly of several presidential decrees that increase penalties for traffickers, define the status of trafficking victims and mandate measures to provide protection and medical care and to guarantee social security to these victims.] As a result, Fedorov said that the GOB has increased its number of prosecutions of traffickers in 2005, with the border guards initiating five such criminal trials. However, in response to DCM's question about the effectiveness of the new decrees, Ministry of Labor and Social Issues representative Irina Chutkova noted that while it was positive that the decrees regulated labor practices that could be questionable, she indicated nonverbally that the decrees were over-the-top. The GOB is still

working to improve their laws to combat TIP. MOI representative Oleg Pekarskiy informed Pol/Econ Chief that the GOB is currently trying to gather examples of anti-TIP legislation from well-developed countries who have a successful track record of fighting TIP and requested examples of anti-TIP legislation from the United States.

13. (SBU) Comment: Similar to fighting money laundering and terrorism finance (reftel), combating TIP remains an issue of mutual interest between the GOB and the United States. The GOB is clearly interested in demonstrating its efforts to combat TIP, perhaps in an effort to garner U.S. support for Belarus' anti-TIP information coordination plan entitled, "Global Partnership Against Slavery and Human Trafficking in 21st Century," that President Lukashenko launched at the 2005 UNGA.

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